

Blackbuck Sanctuary over a period of one century, and also its impact on different wild animals. Regular monitoring of the bird in a large spatial area is required, and also the monitoring of the habitat, to know more about the population trend.

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## 12. RECENT RECORDS OF YELLOW-EYED PIGEON *COLUMBA EVERSMANNI* IN RAJASTHAN<sup>1</sup>

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The Yellow-eyed Pigeon *Columba evermanni* is a rare winter/passage migrant in the Indian subcontinent. It breeds in Central Asia from the southern Aral sea south to north-east Iran and Tien Shan Mountains and northern Afghanistan east to Lake Balkhash and far western China, and winters in southern parts of its breeding range south to Pakistan and north-west India (Gibbs *et al.* 2001).

The species is classified as vulnerable because it has declined rapidly in the past as a result of changing agricultural practices and hunting in its wintering grounds, and possibly habitat loss in its breeding grounds (BirdLife International 2000).

HSS was fascinated by the species after reading an article in the *Hornbill* (Singh 1980). However, it was only after his visit to Harike in Punjab with Per Undeland (PU) that he really started looking for the species in Rajasthan. Incidentally, PU highlighted the presence of large flocks at Harike by writing about the species (Undeland 1997) and reporting to the Oriental Bird Club (Crosby 1995; Robson 1996, 1997).

On February 17, 2001 while censusing vultures, HSS and Rishad Naoraji flushed c.70 birds at Camel Breeding

Farm, Jor-Bir, Bikaner (28° 04' N, 73° 23' E) in the cold morning from two-three *Salvadora persica* trees. The birds were quite concealed in the canopy of the trees that they almost missed seeing them. The pigeons burst out of the trees when they unknowingly drove their jeep too close to them. Although the pigeons rapidly flew away there was no mistaking their diagnostic white rumps. After flying about for one or two minutes they settled on about four *Salvadora persica* trees.

Again at Jor-Bir c. 100 birds were observed foraging on the ground on December 18, 2001. The flock was extremely wary and after flying away settled on three or four *Salvadora persica* trees. Once settled they were lost in the canopy of the trees; only those birds which perched on the tree tops were visible.

Incidentally, R.G. Sonia, a senior officer of the Forest Department of Rajasthan, presented a set of photographs of the species to HSS. While posted at Bikaner, he photographed a mixed flock of about ten Rock Pigeons *Columba livia*, and fifteen Yellow-eyed Pigeons *C. evermanni* at Jor-Bir on November 11, 1995 when they came to drink water at a pool.

As an aside, this open area with scattered *Salvadora persica*, *Prosopis cineraria* and *Zizyphus mauritiana* has

been attracting vultures in large numbers since 1998. The area is used by the municipality of Bikaner city for dumping carcasses (mostly cattle).

SK met with the species near Rupawas, Pali in the first week of February, 1998. About 60 birds were foraging on the ground and when disturbed they flew up on the trees "not like our pigeons (*Columba livia*) but like buntings." After the disturbance was over they came down again to the ground to feed.

On April 23, 1998 between 1100-1500 hours, at the border outpost of Kheruwala, Ganganagar, SK counted c. 100 birds on the "border lighting posts of the fence" spread over an area of several kilometres in groups of four or five.

There are two more recent records from Rajasthan. A local *shikari* saw "c. 60 *salara*" (*Columba eversmanni*) in January 2003 on the Gang Canal near Sri Ganganagar (Gurdip Singh pers. comm.). Three birds were seen in the Kadam Kunj area of Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur first on January 4,

1999 and then during the first week of March. Most of the time they were seen on a Kadamba *Anthocephalus cadamba* (Vibhu Prakash *in litt.* 2000). Incidentally, there is only one old record of the species from Bharatpur. Abdulali (1970) during a three day visit to Bharatpur in October 1951 saw the species "in pairs and parties of 15/20 in open"

While posted at Tonk, HSS was informed by Aziz-ul-Haq of the erstwhile Tonk family that up to 1970s the birds were sporadically shot during winter months in Tonk district. The species was so well recognized that it also had a local name. The local *shikaris* used to call it *pitkula*.

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### 13. ON THE SIGHTING OF THE LESSER COUCAL *CENTROPUS BENGALENSIS* IN THE ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS<sup>1</sup>

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During a recent bird watching program in the Andaman Islands a Coucal that fitted the description of the Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*, a previously unrecorded species in the Islands, was observed on April 5, 2004 close to No. 6 at Havelock Island. The bird was subsequently re-sighted the next day very briefly early in the morning. The bird that we sighted was smaller than the common Andaman Coucal *Centropus andamanensis*, and the Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* found commonly across India. It was black except for deep rusty brown/chestnut wings, with a burst of flight, typical of coucals observed as it crossed the road. It allowed us to stop and confirm our sighting, however, a photograph was

not possible within the short span of observation and also due to the heavy brush of the roadside where it had perched.

The only species of *Centropus* that have been recorded from the Andaman & Nicobar Islands include the endemic Andaman Coucal *Centropus andamanensis* (Grimmett *et al.* 1999), and sightings of a coucal species on Great Nicobar Island (Sivakumar 2000), which was possibly the Lesser Coucal (R. Sankaran pers. comm.). On a subsequent field visit in May 2004 to Little Andaman Island, a bird the size of the Andaman Coucal, but of the coloration of the mainland coucal, was spotted in the beach forest of South Bay (Totibue), Little Andaman Island.